Improve Symptoms With the FODMAP Diet for IBS

by KRYSTINA OSTERMEYER

The Low FODMAP Diet for IBS Relief

If you're a sufferer of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), you may have tried all kinds of medications to treat your symptoms. You may avoid IBS triggers to dodge the dreaded symptoms. However, there actually may be a specific diet for you that can eliminate — or at least greatly minimize — your symptoms.

What is the Low-FODMAP Diet?

The low-FODMAP diet is aimed at limiting certain carbohydrates from the diet. The goal is not to eliminate all carbohydrates — just certain ones known to cause discomfort for IBS sufferers.

FODMAP is short for fermentable oligo-, di-, monosaccharides and polyols. Not all carbohydrates are FODMAPs. The average person doesn't have a problem with FODMAPs, but for people with IBS, a diet rich in FODMAPs may cause discomfort.

The goal of a low-FODMAP diet is to find out which FODMAP carbohydrates cause symptoms and reduce those from the diet. You may note that some FODMAPs cause your IBS symptoms, while others don't.

How Can a Low-FODMAP Diet Help IBS?

According to the Celiac Disease Foundation, it is believed that 10-20 percent of the world's population suffers from IBS. IBS is often confused with other gastrointestinal disorders, such as celiac disease.

However, the frustrating thing about IBS is that the large intestine is not functioning properly, but there is no identifiable cause.

FODMAP carbohydrates are known to cause symptoms for IBS sufferers due to the way they are digested. They are often poorly digested and absorbed in the small intestine.

When they enter the large intestine, the gut flora digests them as their own food, by the process of fermentation. The process of fermentation causes the release of gas, causing bloating. The undigested food then continues through the digestive tract, drawing water with it, causing diarrhea.

For people sensitive to certain FODMAPs, avoiding them can greatly decrease the discomfort associated with eating these foods.

How to Implement a FODMAP Diet for IBS

The first thing to do before starting a low-FODMAP diet is identifying foods that are FODMAPs.

FODMAPs include the following:

- **Polyols:** sugar alcohols, fruits that have pits and seeds (plums, cherries, apples, peaches)
- **Fructose:** agave, high-fructose corn syrup, fruits in general
- **Fructans:** wheat, garlic, onions
- **Lactose:** dairy products
- **Galactans:** legumes (beans, lentils)

After you understand which types of foods are FODMAPs, begin by eliminating them from your diet.

It is possible that you are sensitive to all FODMAPs, or only a selection of FODMAPs. You can try to reintroduce the food back into your diet; if symptoms return, you can assume that the FODMAP causes them.

It is always helpful to consult a registered dietitian (RD) for assistance when implementing a plan for a new diet.

A low-FODMAP diet does not help everyone. For some people, there are other causes to their IBS. However, a study in *Gastroenterology* reported that 75 percent of people who started a low-FODMAP diet had symptoms decrease immediately.

When a Low-FODMAP Diet Isn't Helping

Consult an RD, if you have not already. Following a complex diet can be confusing. It is possible that a food you are eating may be a FODMAP and you are not realizing it.

An RD can take a very close look at your diet and pick out things that you may not notice you are doing.

Follow up with your doctor. There are a multitude of medications that can help alleviate your symptoms. Medication options include over-the-counter drugs to increase fiber and eliminate diarrhea, and prescription medications that decrease spasms of the bowels.

In addition, antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications may be helpful if your symptoms are related to depression and anxiety. There are also a couple of prescription medications that are specific to IBS, although there are specific guidelines for who they may be prescribed to.